

Soldiers complete recipe for FOB-in-the Box

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CAMP TAJI, Iraq – Take 32 containers, fill them with 4,000 sheets of plywood, 900 sleeping mats and the same amount of blankets, 60 General Purpose Medium Tents, and the same number of light sets, throw in some fuel and water cans, spice it up with some heaters and you have a ‘FOB(Forward Operating Base) in the Box.’

The numbers are only approximate, but this is the kind of equipment Soldiers from the 428th Quartermaster Company, an Army Reserve unit from Minnesota, were dealing with, as they assembled a total of five ‘FOB in the Box’ kits in the past eight months.

The kits are used when setting up a brand new forward operating base, or if the need for the immediate housing of troops occurs due to some unforeseeable circumstances. Each kit can support close to a 1,000 Soldiers.

“We started dealing with the ‘FOB in the Box’ concept in November of 2005. We inherited it from the corps support battalion that we replaced,” said Master Sgt. James Anderson, an automated logistical specialist with the 189th Corps Support Battalion. Anderson works in the Support Operations’ supply and service section, and he is in charge of ordering all the items that go in the kits that the quartermaster company Soldiers assemble.

Since the 428th’s warehouse platoon didn’t have a mission because the SSA (Supply Support Activity) is run by Kellogg, Brown and Root, they were tasked with running the ‘FOB in the Box’ operation, said Capt. Scott Noyes, the company commander. “They were all commended for a job well done. I know they all got battalion coins, a few of them got Army Achievement Medals for their work.”

Assembling the kits is not as easy as it may sound. It takes a lot of coordination, different types of equipment like forklifts, or cranes, and lots of physical labor, said Staff Sgt. Roger Tabula, a logistical specialist who was one of NCOs in charge of the project.

“A lot of it is waiting for the equipment to get in. . . It took about five and a half months to get the first three full sets ready to go,” said Tabula. It also takes a lot of coordination to get transportation equipment or forklifts for moving the material that comes in to the site where the kits are being assembled, he added.

Loading the plywood in the containers can be a challenge. “The length of the plywood doesn’t allow us to load it in easily,” said Sgt. Matt Hendrickson, also an automated logistical specialist with the 428th. “Each sheet of plywood weighs close to 100 pounds, because they are one inch thick. They are heavy. Try to lift 4,000 of them.”

Because of the weight of the plywood, the team quickly learned not to put more than 250 in each container. If plywood packed the containers, it makes the Palletized Load Systems transporting the containers top heavy, making them more prone to flipping over, Hendrickson explained.

The team also faced the challenges of having to move the assembly site three times. At first the location changed because land surveyors showed up, measuring out the foundations for new buildings. The next site flooded when the rainy season hit, said Noyes.

It was during the rainy season, when having a 'FOB in the Box' really paid off. A FOB had an electrical fire, and many Soldiers lost their personnel equipment and accommodations. That is when the first kit was deployed and tested. "The first set that went out took us less than 18 hours to get it to the FOB once we got notified," said Anderson.

Other sets were sent to Rhamadi to help the Marines not too long ago. Set No. 5 is still awaiting certain items; the due-in date on some is not until 2007, Anderson explained. "The hardest items to get in are the plywood and the four-by-fours," he said.

Generators are also in such a high demand in theater, that although the original packing list contained generators, none have come in yet, said Hendrickson.

The Soldiers involved in the process are proud to have worked on such an important and useful project.

"The 'FOB in the Box' isn't just about assembling miscellaneous plywood and all the items," said Hendrickson. "It is about coming up with a set that is going to go to a camp that is going to support their living. It is to support their daily life, their operations. To realize that it is going to support Soldiers and help complete their mission is an important concept."



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